



Beattie, A. R., Eroukhmanoff, C. and Head, N. (2019) Introduction: interrogating the 'everyday' politics of emotions in international relations. *Journal of International Political Theory*, (doi:doi10.1177/1755088219830428).

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Deposited on: 22 February 2019

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Introduction: Interrogating the ‘everyday’ politics of emotions in international relations

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Keywords: emotions, everyday politics, power, micro-politics, embodiment, levels of analysis

Abstract

The focus on the everyday in this special issue reveals different kinds of emotional practices, their political effects and their political contestation within both micro- and macro-politics in International Relations. The articles in this Special Issue address the everyday negotiation of emotions, shifting between the reproduction of hegemonic structures of feelings and emancipation from them. In other words, the everyday *politics* of emotions allows an exploration of who gets to express emotions, what emotions are perceived as (il)legitimate or (un)desirable, how emotions are circulated and under what circumstances. Consequently, we identify two thematic strands which emerge as central to an interrogation of ‘everyday’ emotions in IR and which run through each of the contributions: firstly, an exploration of relationship between individual and collective emotions, and secondly, a focus on the role of embodiment within emotions research and its relationship to the dynamics and structures of power.

Introduction

Whilst traditionally excluded from Western political and philosophical writings, emotions and their role within the public, political, and international spheres have increasingly become an accepted focus of International Relations (IR) research. Emotions, for so long identified with the private, the feminine and the non-political, eroded reason which was, in turn, seen as the more reliable source of knowledge. Emotions were studied outside the discipline of IR, falling within those fields of inquiry that embraced subjective and marginalized renderings of the political. Alison Jaggar, for example, put forward a feminist epistemology that suggests the possibility of 'outlaw emotions'; emotions that are identifiable by their subversion of dominant norms, assumptions, values and perceptions (1989). Her article set out a research agenda picked up by feminist scholars within and beyond IR which attends to subjective and embodied responses to emotions. Following Jaggar (1989: 152) and wider feminist contributions, this special issue recognises emotions as a valuable source of knowledge and one that invites an embodied and subjective epistemology. Emotions provide insight into hegemonic emotional knowledge, revealing dynamics of power shaping everyday micro and macro interactions. They motivate new inquiry into social and political life as well as creating and sustaining alternative emotional practices informed by an affective feminist curiosity (Åhäll, 2018). In this vein, we embrace a reflexive sensibility (Amoureux and Steele, 2016) and seek to further advance the debates regarding emotions discourse within international politics.

In their 2008 article Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison address one of the key challenges and tasks; namely, what methodology is best suited to the study of emotions in world politics. Bleiker and Hutchison acknowledge a diversity of methodologies and multidisciplinary approaches with which to study emotions in IR:

Scientific and social scientific methods, for instance, can be employed to assess how individuals experience and process emotions. Related inquiries range from neuroscientific studies into brain stimuli to quantitative surveys of how individuals respond emotionally to particular political events. Such modes of analysis are, however, less appropriate when it comes to understanding the manner in which emotions are represented and communicated. Here, methods from the humanities, such

as those designed to interpret texts or visual sources, can provide us with important insight into the processes through which individuals emotions become collectivized (2008: 134).

This was followed in 2014 with a Forum on Emotions and World Politics in *International Theory* which identified one of the key challenges which lay ahead to be theorizing the leap from the individual to the collective experience of emotions. If emotions are to be relevant for international relations, as Bleiker and Hutchison noted, emotions “have to have some kind of collective dimension” (2014, 492). This set of interventions more explicitly opened up a debate between micro (how certain emotions resonate in specific situations) and macro (general theories of how emotions work) approaches and, for some, differentiated ‘emotions’ from ‘feelings’ and ‘affect’. It is within these three inter-related concepts – feelings, emotions and affect – and their epistemological ramifications that an important debate has become established.

We argue that a perspective on the everyday aspect of emotions can be productive in theorizing the turn from one level to another as it encompasses all three inter-related concepts (feelings, emotions, affect). Following Ahmed, we highlight the relational aspect of emotions in the everyday as an *encounter* or a site of contact between two entities, rather than imagining emotions ‘out there’ or ‘in here’ (Ahmed, 2014: 7). As such, the everyday can also constitute a bridge between the three levels of analysis. What is of interest in the everyday politics of emotions is both the role of emotions in forming intersubjective relationships and the agency of everyday actors in reinforcing or circumscribing particular emotional scripts and knowledge. As such, it is at the intersection between power, everyday politics and resistance that this collection of essays is situated. The articles which follow view emotions as integral parts of our common-sense structures and ways of knowing about the world as well as sites of resistance to transform hegemonic power.

The focus on the everyday in this special issue reveals different kinds of emotional practices, their political effects and their political contestation. Each contribution addresses the everyday negotiation of emotions, shifting between the reproduction of hegemonic structures of feelings and emancipation from them. In other words, the authors pay attention to the everyday *politics* of emotions: an examination of who gets to express emotions, what emotions are perceived as legitimate or desirable (and

conversely which should be repressed or are illegitimate), how emotions are circulated and under what circumstances (Zembylas, 2007). As Michalinos Zembylas (2007) notes, power is at the heart of emotional expression, whether this expression is in the classroom, at sites of mourning, in the public sphere, 'in the atmosphere', or in-between representations of subjects or materialities. Consequently, within the wider literature we identify two thematic strands which emerge as central to an interrogation of 'everyday' emotions in IR: firstly, an exploration of relationship between individual and collective emotions, and secondly, a focus on the role of embodiment within emotions research and its relationship to the dynamics and structures of power.

Seeking the 'everyday' in the international

The 'level of analysis' problem is manifested by contested approaches to individual, collective, temporal and spatial conceptualizations of emotions. These debates are shaped by the agendas of different disciplines, notably psychology (accounting for an individual perspective), neuroscience (with a focus on cognition and other processes such as mirror neurons), social psychology (with its focus on inter-group relations); sociology (with a focus on social movements); IR (a focus on groups, communities and the state generates a social and collective perspective), feminism (with a focus on power and reflexivity), and geography (through interests in space and place as relevant to the production of affect). A focus on 'affect', as it relates to affective geographies such as mood, flows or energies, charging different spaces and/or moving in between subjects and objects also addresses the movement between individual and collective emotions. For some scholars, affect is pre-cognitive, non-subjective, pre-personal, and lies beyond representation, thus indicating a shift towards a pre- or extra discursive reality (Greco and Stenner, 2008: 9). Affect scholars have, in many ways, brought the study of emotions back to the body. For Deleuze and Guattari, affect 'cannot be reduced to either 'discourse' or 'emotion', but rather exceeds these categories; it is a material intensity that emerges via the 'in-between' spaces of embodied encounters, circulating power not primarily as a mode of discursive regulation but rather as the potential to 'become otherwise' (Pedwell and Whitehead, 2012: 116). Studies on affect in IR have explored 'security atmospheres' (Adey, 2014), the 'public moods' that invest the space in between bodies (Ringmar, 2017), and issues of ontological security from the point of view of the 'circulation of affects' and agents' broader affective environments (Solomon, 2017). While such interdisciplinarity

has enriched the study of emotions generally, it has also sparked disagreements with regards to the most appropriate methodology to study emotions and the ways in which feelings, emotions and affect are embedded in the construction of knowledge.

At the first and individual level, emotions or 'feelings' are personal in that they are located in physical and somatic experience (McDermott, 2014: 558). In this way, emotions are somatic *reactions* responding to specific circumstances that can be consciously felt. While Rose McDermott (2014) has emphasized the role of the body in understanding emotions and their connections with cognition and reason, others such as Jonathan Mercer have argued that 'emotion is ontologically irreducible to the body' (2014: 520). This places the body at the heart of historical and contemporary debates on emotions, their functions and their origins. The role – and primacy – of cognition in relation to emotion has actively preoccupied much of the debate within psychological and rational approaches in IR (McDermott, 2014; Mercer, 2005; Mercer, 2010; Holmes, 2013). Identifying lacunae in the research on this issue, Brent Sasley suggested:

How to distinguish between when emotions are the guiding framework and when cognitive processes are is an avenue for further research. The different causal patterns have significant implications for understanding international relations. If cognition comes first, it could provide stronger support for rationalist over other explanations. If emotions pave the way for cognitive appraisals, post positivists might be in a stronger position to use emotions as a stick with which to beat mainstream IR (2011: 472).

The relational aspect of emotions which emerges from constructivist debates across disciplines has also been an integral part of their theorization as collective/social phenomena requiring a shared emotionology – norms and attitudes that shape appropriate emotions in a society – to be felt and understood by others (Fierke, 2015). As Fierke and Fattah contend (2009: 70), emotions can be felt individually but the successful expression of emotions is in relation to others, in a language and a culture that others will understand. There is therefore a structure of meaning around the experience of emotions that is first and foremost social and relational. This strongly constructivist understanding views emotions as cultural products, bestowed by learned social rules and dependent on emotional intersubjectivity (Koschut, 2017: 7). For example, emotions

such as humiliation require two parties (Saurette, 2006), are given meaning in culturally specific forms, and are felt differently at the collective level in response to different events (Fattah and Fierke, 2009). Sara Ahmed's work on 'affective economies', whereby subjects 'feel' individually but what they feel are a reminder of a bodily experience of *being-in-the-world* (Ahmed, 2003: 386) also speaks to a relational approach. Ahmed emphasises that the boundaries constructed in political discourse are a consequence of affect and the making and unmaking of bodies, that subjects and emotions become 'attached' through the circulation and repetition of signs, figures and objects.

The debate regarding the primacy of cognition has remained largely distinct from feminist perspectives (e.g. Åhäll, 2018, Ahmed, 2014, Shepherd, 2008; Pedwell, 2014; Berlant, 2000; Sylvester, et al. 2011) which focuses instead on 'the ways in which feelings can (re)produce dominant social and geopolitical hierarchies and exclusions' (Pedwell and Whitehead, 2012: 120). Questions of solidarity, resistance, oppression, and political transformation - the 'political effects of emotional practices' (Åhäll, 2018: 3) - lie at the heart of feminist engagement with the politics of emotions. Consequently, the distinction between emotions and affect which at times maps onto distinctions between individual and collective modes of experience and analysis are blurred – or indeed erased as focusing on the wrong target - in feminist approaches. As Åhäll notes, the politics of emotions 'involves both representations of feelings – those "sensations that have found a match in words" – and the bodily movements often identified as affect' (2018: 3). For a long time, feminist scholarship had broken ground in problematising the same binaries emotions scholars seek to destabilize, in particular emotion/reason, private/public, mind/body, yet research on affect and emotions has so far 'not gelled' with feminist writings (Åhäll 2018). What is of primary importance for feminist approaches is the *politics* of emotions and the kinds of gendered, classed, racialized and sexualised practices affect generates. Whether one focuses on emotions, affect or feelings matters less than the political outcome of these affective processes in the (re)production of relations of power. We take Åhäll's critique seriously in that the work undertaken in this special issue seeks to understand and challenge power structures that are mediated as common-sense - the structure that 'goes without saying' (Åhäll 2018: 7) – and focuses on the ways to change the status quo even though the puzzle of each contribution is not necessarily about gender.

By the 'everyday', we mean that everyday actors do not simply receive emotional scripts in a passive way (Hobson and Seabrook, 2007). This picks up on recent perspectives on 'the everyday', which have flourished in the last decade (Guillaume 2011). Some have paid attention to everyday narratives in world politics (see the special issue by Stanley and Jackson 2016), others to everyday life in the global political economy (Davies 2006, Seabrooke 2011; Elias and Roberts 2016), everyday conceptions of security and terrorism (Jarvis and Lister 2016; Vaughn-Williams and Stevens 2016), everyday conceptions of peace and conflict (MacGinty 2014), everyday gendered relations and how these produce gendered global relations (Enloe 2011), the *Buffyverse* and popular culture as the everyday (Rowley and Weldes 2012), in order to demonstrate, as Enloe (2011) has convincingly argued, that the 'mundane matters'.

In this way, the authors show that collective emotions are not the preserve of political or cultural elites to manipulate audiences, but instead they may be contested, embodied, incorporated and re-appropriated. Judith Butler reminds us that offensive name-calling such as 'queer' is a bodily violent act in itself, but that it can perform a reversal of effects by being 'returned' to its speaker as an act of defiance (Butler 1997:14). The collected articles here similarly demonstrate that when collective emotions are imposed by powerful actors such as the state, they are not automatically individualised or absorbed by subjects at the everyday level. Rather, emotions can be key to the subjugation of or resistance to power by re-appropriating, transforming and 'returning' them to the sender. This negotiation occurs in the margins of politics and international relations: in lived experiences of trauma (Beattie), in the practice of cosplay (Birkedal) and method acting (Eken), in interpretations of popular culture (Reinke de Buitrago), in the circulation of visual memes (Eroukhmanoff) and in processes of grieving after terrorist attacks (Koschut). The contributions in this Special Issue thus look at the everyday roles and potentials of emotions in areas of Politics and IR which are often invisible to the mainstream debates.

Finding the 'everyday' in the international

IR has traditionally been concerned with 'high politics', the decisions made by governments and their leaders, in a Westphalian system constituted of 'superpowers', 'middle-range' or 'weak' powers. Politics has, therefore, broadly been understood to happen at the elite level while the emotions of individuals at the everyday level are

irrelevant at best and dangerous at worst for the political sphere. Not many studies start with the 'margins, silences and bottom rungs' (Enloe, 1996), notably as a result of 'methodological elitism' (Stanley and Jackson 2016) but also because individuals or groups outside the state are not always constituted as active agents in the creation and transformation of international political life. One consequence of this is that it reaffirms the traditional divide between emotions and rationality insofar as it presupposes that everyday bodies are subjected to a variety of 'irresponsible' emotions while state actors use rational means to make important decisions. The articles addressing this concern here seek to attend to the ways in which the relationship between individuals and collectives shape an understanding of 'everyday emotions' in international relations.

Koschut explores how emotions navigate dynamics of power in this context of the tension between top-down and bottom-up conceptions of emotions and power. He provides an innovative interrogation of the relationship between governments and their publics through an exploration of grief and bereavement in the aftermath of the German Market terrorist attacks in 2015. He develops an account of 'affective sites of contestation' in which emotions, and the relationships that they foster within communities and within and between the state and its citizens, may be defined and re-imagined in the aftermath of a terrorist attack. Koschut's article attends to the collective level of analysis, by exploring the social construction of grief and how its suppression can activate collective contestation and resistance.

Both Koschut and Eroukhmanoff highlight the powerful forces of emotional governance present in the ways in which the state attempts to govern by imposing emotional narratives onto subjects. They suggest that emotions and their individual and collective appropriation are not fixed or uncontested (for Koschut), but rather represent a form of policing (for Eroukhmanoff). The focus on different types of discourse and their embodied consequences underpin enquiries into the hidden power structures of emotional governance within states following terror attacks in the 'West' and how this is in turn contested by defying the politics of grief and the narrative of a 'secure state' (Koschut) or by reading 'Je suis Charlie' 'One Love' and 'I heart MCR' through a Deleuzian logic of sensation (Eroukhmanoff). In doing so, they entwine the presence of the body with discourses of violence and grief.

On the one hand, the case of the Berlin Christmas attack indicates an attempt by the state to restrain emotions such as grief, which in turn formed the basis for local

communities to contest the politics of grief shaped by the state. On the other hand, the case of the Charlie Hebdo attacks and the visual memes responding to the violence of terrorism through 'Je suis Charlie' and 'One Love', show an outpouring of seemingly positive emotions but have, in the view of Eroukhmanoff, failed to contest the logic of violence. Rather the affective atmospheres of the post-Charlie attack reaffirmed the need for a state-led military response to terrorism. The visual expression of emotions such as love and solidarity are explored in Eroukhmanoff's article, but in the end do not yield positive results in establishing 'one love' within societies. In this way, Eroukhmanoff's contribution, like Koschut's, points to the ambivalent nature of emotions. Situated between the collective and spatial understanding of emotions, Eroukhmanoff argues that posting memes of solidarity in the digital sphere or attending vigils can be understood as spontaneous and subjective reactions to traumatic events which fills the body with 'mixed emotions' (Ross, 2014).

Birkedal and Eken also implicitly touch upon the relationship between the individual and the collective in the everyday through the sense-making effects of embodiment and narrative which seek to bridge cultural and moral perspectives and norms around gender and violence. In Birkedal's case, the cosplayer as an individual is situated in - both reflecting and resisting - collective understandings of gendered agency, social context and normative environment. In Eken's case, his article focuses on how everyday people affectively practice and situate themselves in international politics through visual and narrative cultures. Here, too, there is a process of dissemination and resistance to state narratives of war-making and mainstream US visual culture by individuals navigating their own identities in response to films as a medium for geopolitics.

Addressing embodiment as the second dimension of everyday politics, Birkedal, Eken and Beattie actively bring the body back to the study of emotions in International Relations. In her article on cosplay and conflict Birkedal provides both an embodied and subjective rendering of the representation of violence showcasing how particular characters, such as Black Widow from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, take on emotional attributes from within their narratives. Such narratives, she suggests, take on a life of their own when interrogated from within a particular form of embodiment - through role-play - that challenges orthodox forms of meaning making. This poses the question what can scholars learn by actively seeking out a negotiation of a world in character?

Birkedal thus engages not only with discussion of personal embodiment and emotions; she also taps into the narratives of popular culture emerging within the discipline of International Relations. Birkedal tackles questions of embodiment of militarized narratives by arguing that popular culture is an affective sense-making medium that reifies gendered norms of violence. In so doing, Birkedal more directly displays Åhäll's (2018: 45) affective feminist curiosity that zooms in on the less obvious puzzles of what emotions do in popular culture. What is more, it seeks to negotiate the Gordian knot of this particular discourse; namely, the transference of emotions from the level of the individual to the social and political interpretations they facilitate and legitimate. It does so by looking at emotions as intrinsically social and cultural things that 'are neither purely internal to the individual nor divorced from a background and social context' (Fierke 2014: 563).

These interpretations of bodies ask us to consider the role that bodies and embodiment play in the production of knowledge. That some bodies are privileged over others is a phenomenon recognised in the writings of Judith Butler on the Global War on Terror which reveal the primacy of western lives over others (2006; 2010). This is particularly poignant in light of the claims of illiberality made by Eken who is interested in understanding how the state is able to 'get under the skin' of its citizens by exploring the tools the state has at its disposal to develop the emotional ties that bind the population to high power politics and *raison d'état*. He turns his gaze to a particular era in American cinematic history to explore the particular strengths of method acting, as evidenced in 1950s America, arguing that this approach provides strong emotional ties that invigorated commitment and loyalty to the state. In essence, he suggests, citizens bought into narratives of American primacy owing to their allegiance to screen actors' portrayals of the American military agenda.

Taken together, Birkedal and Eken suggest alternative modes of meaning making that contest the traditional marginalization in IR of embodiment and emotion through an invocation of popular culture (see for example Grayson, et. al. 2009; Weldes 2003). More broadly, these articles remind us of a point articulated by Solomon (2015) namely, that the study of bodies should play a more central role in the study of emotions in IR. This is important, he argues, because to date the study of emotions has been primarily *disembodied*. He writes that '[d]iscourse-based approaches in IR - mainly poststructuralism - have focused on how meanings and subjectivities are produced in

language. However, the focus on language often downplays the more affective and visceral dimensions of security and identity' (2015). Through their reliance on cosplay and method acting these two articles reveals an unorthodox perspective on the role of bodies in the production and co-production of violent war-based narratives and the underlying emotional narratives they excavate.

The positionality and embodiment of the researcher is also taken up by Beattie. Drawing on autoethnography and story-telling in IR her article challenges academics and, in particular global ethicists, to re-imagine their position as producers of knowledge. How the relationship between emotions and global ethics is articulated in terms of looking to the future prompts a range of questions. As Kate Schick (2011) has argued, so often ethicists attend to a future better world at the cost of ongoing harm in the present. The embodied experience of present harm fails to be articulated and the emotional quality of this lived experience is overshadowed by more abstract normative commitments. Reneé Jeffery (2011; 2014) offers one particular pathway to reveal emotions within a cosmopolitan ethics, writing of the importance of emotions in ethical decision-making within an innovative framework that blends 18th century moral sentiment theory with emerging discussions within the field of neuroscience and psychology. She provides a compelling argument which shows how the iteration of emotions as irrational and harmful to ethical decision-making is in fact, misleading. Rather, emotions, she suggests, play a valuable role in the reasonable deliberations of agents which opens the door to the blending of the normative discussions surrounding global ethics and the wider discussions within interdisciplinary literatures on emotions that attend to the role of cognition.

Contributing to this debate, Beattie suggests a process of unknowing and uncertainty as a means of rendering embodied voices more explicit. Silence, she goes on to suggest, might provide one (but not the sole) pathway to explore disempowerment and to navigate both vulnerability and insecurity from within a position of assumed privilege that is the cosmopolitan ethical narrative. In order to achieve this end, she asks if scholars might eschew talking and, instead, embrace a form of active listening. Doing so offers the possibility of carving out a space within which the marginalized and traditionally disenfranchised might engage in conversations and, therefore, enact a relational form of knowledge co-production. Silence, she writes, has a valuable role to play in this process. Thus Beattie seeks to attend explicitly to the position of global

ethicists and to problematise the nature of their reflexive position within the systemic rendering of IR.

Eroukhmanoff's interrogation of love, peace and solidarity through the visuality of memes adds depth to the debate over the passions in politics and draws our attention to the significance of visuality and aesthetics for interrogating the connections between politics, emotions, and embodiment. Rather than addressing the lived experience of violence, the visual responses which have proliferated in response to terror attacks in Western states instead sensationalize events and shape the kinds of emotional governance which emerges. Consequently, Eroukhmanoff asks whether the visual articulations of peace, love and solidarity have the capacity to enable communities of mourning to actually *sense* – and thus to embody - peace, solidarity and love. In so doing, Eroukhmanoff provides an innovative discussion which brings together visual security narratives with emotions discourse and collective affects within emotional communities.

The relationship between the emotional and the visual similarly runs through the writing of Reinke de Buitrago. Her article provides an alternative means of engaging with visual security, pushing 'ordinary' individuals to reflexively engage with political cartoons representing the 2015 Nuclear Negotiations between Iran and the United States of America (USA). Reinke de Buitrago draws on a representational mode of inquiry – discourse analysis – by drawing together both discourse and images to examine the expressions of emotions from the point of view of audiences reacting to Western cartoons of the Iran-US nuclear deal. She engages with the relationship between identity and the subjectivity of knowledge production within International Relations. Her innovation lies, in particular, in the discussion of the color red when individuals interpreted the cartoons focused upon. There is an emerging consideration of the intersection of visual security (Hansen, 2011; Bleiker, 2015) and the interpretation of colour. Chromatology, as Andersen et. al (2015) write, is the study of colour in relation to people. If, as Reinke de Buitrago suggests, the interpretation of colour can be related back to the embodied experience of the local subject and their subsequent interpretation of security-related issues, then there is much to learn regarding the wider influence of emotions on the visualization of high security politics.

A perspective on the 'everyday' indicates that emotions are not merely *received* passively when governments invoke them in public discourse. Rather, emotions can be accepted, rejected, returned to the sender, and importantly, can be an emancipatory force

to re-imagine or resist hegemonic power. In that sense, while emotions are often studied as tools that can be mobilized *in order to* legitimise certain practices, we believe that this utilitarian perspective misses an important part of the power and role of emotions in international politics and that this is evident when we look at emotions from the everyday. Overall, in this special issue we have sought to place the ‘how’ of emotions work at the front and centre of our political inquiries, thus strengthening our capacity to respond to the world in ways that challenge dominant conceptions of power.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank BISA and Aston University for their generous support of the Research Workshop in June 2017 which first allowed these papers to be presented and from which the special issue originated. We would also like to thank the reviewer who provided each author with such careful, constructive, and incisive feedback. Lastly, a big thanks to all of our authors and workshop participants for their excellent and enjoyable contributions and discussions.

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